

CHAPTER EIGHT

Making the Shot and Afterwards

Learning Objectives

At the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- A. Describe four different hunting techniques.
- B. List three questions you need to ask yourself before you shoot an animal.
- C. Explain why it is important to know where to place a shot and identify the different body angles.
- D. List the steps for tracking a wounded animal.
- E. Describe the basic steps and reasons for tagging, field dressing, caring for meat, and transporting an animal.



Introduction





You've been watching a deer slowly work his way toward you for over an hour. Your excitement is building and your heart is pounding. As the deer moves into range, you place your sights on a point behind his shoulder and squeeze off a shot. The deer falls down but then gets up and runs off through heavy underbrush. Now what do you do?

You've made all the preparations for your hunt, you've gotten yourself out to the field, and now you're ready to start hunting! But what's your strategy? Will you actively pursue game, or wait for it to come to you? Once you spot your target and have it in range, where *exactly*, should you aim? And what do you do *after* your shot?

In this chapter, we'll help you figure out how to find your game and get yourself set up for a shot, how to recognize where and when you can make the best shot, and teach you what to do after you make your kill.

A. What techniques can I use to hunt big game?

There are four primary hunting techniques you can use to hunt big game animals:

-  Still hunting
-  Stalking
-  Stand hunting
-  Game drive

Still-hunting

When still-hunting, you move slowly and quietly through an area, stopping often to watch and listen in hope that an animal will come into your view. Sometimes, you see an animal but it's

Key Words

One-shot kill

Evidence of sex

Vital organs

Field dressing

Tagging

not close enough for a shot. In these situations, you may need to combine still-hunting with another hunting technique called stalking. Generally speaking, you are more likely to see game if you are still and the game is moving, than if you are moving and the game is still.

Stalking

Stalking is a slow, patient movement of the hunter into shooting position by following signs such as a track in the snow or by following the animal itself after it has been sighted. Just like still-hunting, stalking is best accomplished in an area where you can move quietly. It is helpful to have trees, shrubs or grass to hide behind as you sneak up on the animal. Perhaps most important is wind direction. Always try to move into the wind, so the wind carries your sound and scent away from the animal. **Beware:** Stalking can be dangerous if there are several hunters stalking the same animal without knowing there are other hunters in the area.

Stand-hunting

In stand-hunting, you select a location where you can oversee an area used by game and you stand (or sit) where an animal is expected to appear. Stands can be as simple as a spot behind a fallen log or rock or may be as elaborate as a tree-stand. A treestand is effective because it raises you and your scent off the ground. To be successful, the most important part about stand-hunting is the selection of a good location, such as the intersection of game trails or along a watering hole. Wind direction is important, too. Try to position your stand downwind from where you expect an animal to appear.

Game drive

In a game drive one or more hunters walks through an area pushing game towards other waiting hunters. Driving can be effective, but it can also be dangerous!

Remember: You've got hunters facing each other, looking for opportunities to shoot. You must all be alert and extremely careful.

The only way this method can be done safely is if all the hunters can see each other as they approach, and if they are careful not to shoot if an animal is anywhere near another hunter. If you want to try this method, select an open area with good visibility, and wear plenty of hunter-orange so you are easily



Stand hunting



Game drive

seen. Then select one person to act as leader, and follow that person's instructions.

B. Picking your shot

At some point, you'll have to choose: to shoot or not to shoot. This is one of the most important decisions you will make in the field because once you pull the trigger, there is absolutely no way for you to call back the shot.

Before you shoot, ask yourself:

- 🦌 **Is the shot safe—do you know your target and what lies beyond it?**
- 🦌 **Is the animal within your personal effective shooting range (the range at which you can shoot accurately)?**
- 🦌 **Is the animal turned in such a way that you can get a good killing shot?**

Your goal is to make one-shot kills every time. The shot you choose plays a large part in deciding whether or not you are successful in getting an animal.

C. Where should I aim?

To make a **one-shot kill** (a shot that kills an animal at once so you do not need to shoot again), one of the things you need to know is where to aim. Even when you know how far away an animal is, and you know you can hit a target at that distance, you still have to place your shot correctly to get a clean and immediate kill. A poorly placed shot will wound an animal and inflict unnecessary suffering. The animal may run off or fly away and you may not be able to find it. It may die from its wounds and is wasted. It is illegal to intentionally waste game in Montana.

Good hunters can hit what they are aiming at and they know where to aim to kill an animal quickly and effectively. They know, in effect, how to place a killing shot.

The most effective shot is one delivered to an animal's **vital organs**—heart, lungs, and liver—located in the body cavity inside the rib cage behind the shoulder. A shot placed in this area, referred to as the vital area, is fatal and produces considerable bleeding since the area also contains major blood vessels. Bleeding is essential in case tracking is necessary. Do not attempt to place a shot in the head and neck since they offer very small targets and may result in an animal being wounded. **If you can't make a killing shot, don't shoot at all.**

There are two different positions that make a killing shot more likely. To make a clean shot, wait for an animal to turn **broad-side** or to be **quartering-away** or **forward**.

Quartering Forward

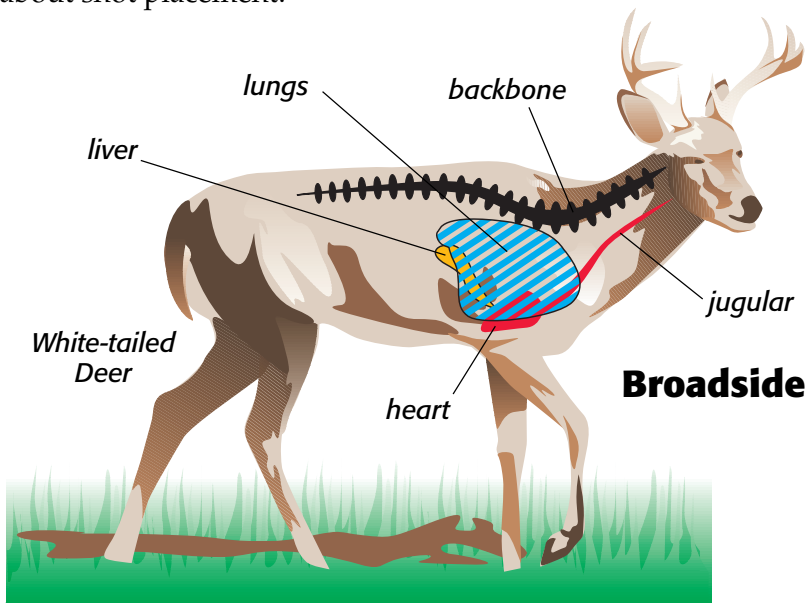


White-tailed Deer

Quartering shot. The quartering shot is placed as an animal presents to you at an angle—either facing away from you (**quartering-away**) or facing toward you (**quartering-forward**). It's an effective shot for deer, antelope and similar-sized animals.

Broadside shot. The broadside shot is preferable for all of Montana's big game animals. In a broadside shot, the bullet doesn't have to pass through the stomach and intestines which might slow the bullet down. Also, on larger animals it is important for the bullet to pass through both of the lungs for an effective and rapid kill.

To place the broadside shot, wait for an animal to turn broadside and then put your sights on the back of the front leg, bring them up the back of the front leg, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way up the body. A shot placed in this area hits the lung/heart area and misses the shoulder and leg bone. Study the following pictures to learn more about shot placement.



D. What to do after the shot

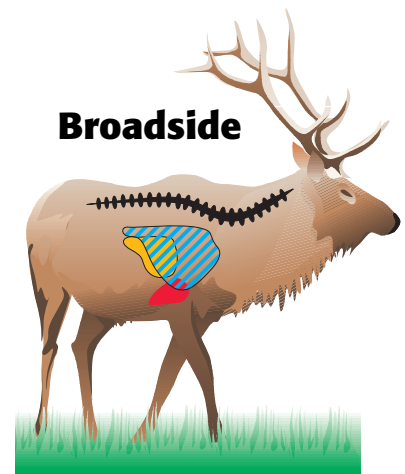
Even if you make a perfect shot, the animal may not fall instantly and die right away. A deer hit in the vital area can run for hundreds of yards before collapsing. It is your responsibility to do your best to recover every animal you shoot.

If a wounded animal does not die on the spot:

- 🦌 Mentally mark the location of the animal when you shot and where you saw it last. Look for some distinctive feature (dead tree, flat rock, etc.). Also, be sure to look back often when tracking. The landscape will look different on the return trip!
- 🦌 Wait for 30 minutes before following a wounded animal. A wounded animal will likely lie down. It might die there on the spot or become too weak to get up by the time you find



Black Bear



Elk

it. It may take as long as 4-6 hours for an animal hit outside the heart/lung area to die.

• While waiting, go over the shot in your mind: What was the animal doing before you shot? What did the animal do when you shot it? Did the position of its body change when you shot?

• Even if you think you didn't hit the animal always check for blood, hair, or bone chips near the spot where it was standing. Unusual running behavior after a shot may indicate that an animal has been hit.

• Go slowly and look carefully for signs of a hit. Always assume you made your shot until you recover the animal or are absolutely certain you missed it cleanly.

• In case you need to track a wounded animal, use this technique:

- Mark the place you were standing when you shot and the area where the animal was standing when it was shot.
- Take a compass bearing on the direction you saw the animal go.
- Look for blood, tracks, meat, hair or bone on grass, rocks, leaves and trees as well as broken twigs, disturbed vegetation and broken ground.
- At first sign, mark the site with highly visible flagging material (remember to remove this tape after you find the animal).
- Follow the animal's path, marking the trail at each sign.
- Walk to the side of the trail if possible, so you don't disturb sign.
- If you have somebody helping you track, trackers and flankers should keep 50 yards apart. The tracker concentrates on the trail while flankers look ahead for downed or fleeing game.
- Never give up on a trail until you've made every effort to find the next sign. If you lose the trail, start searching in widening circles from the last sign especially downhill and near water since that's where wounded animals sometimes tend to go.
- Approach downed wildlife carefully. Approach from behind and poke the animal with a stick to make sure it is dead. Watch to see if it is breathing. If there is no sign of movement, check the eyes. If the eye does not blink, the animal is dead. If the animal is still alive, kill it quickly with a shot to the base of the ear, making sure the shot is safe.

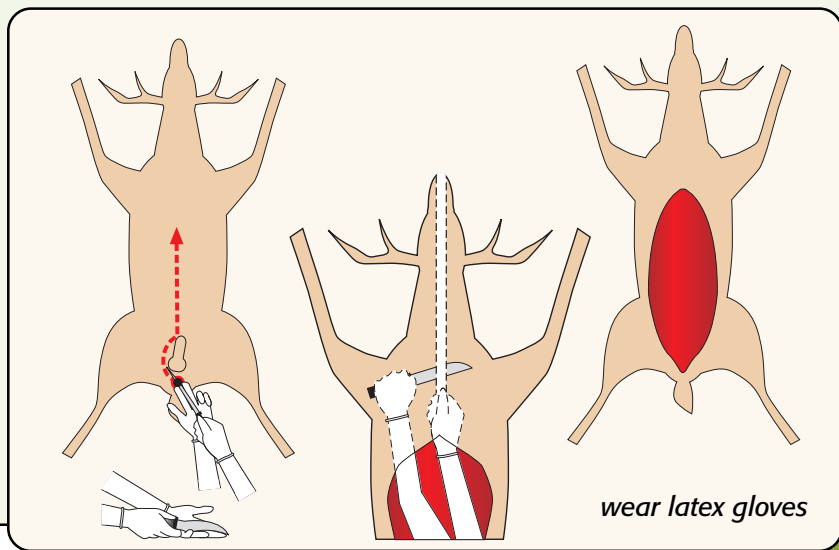


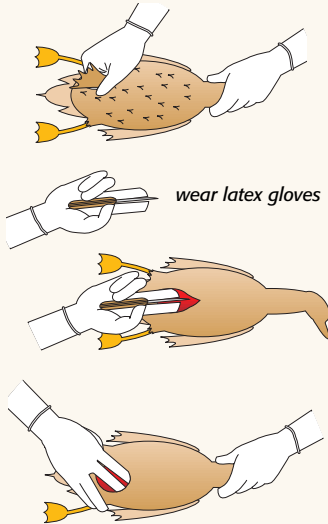
Appreciate the Gift. Few things are more satisfying or bitter-sweet than the moment at which you take the life of an animal. You may be proud of your accomplishment at the same time that you feel sadness for the death of the animal. Take a moment to give thanks for all that hunting means to you and for the wonderful gift you have received—a gift provided by the wild land.

A Game Warden's Field Dressing Tips for White-tailed Deer

In years past, it was not unusual for a game warden to have to field dress a road killed deer. The key was to do it quickly and cleanly. You can learn from the method developed and used by game wardens. **DO NOT USE THIS METHOD ON A DEER THAT YOU WANT MOUNTED**

1. Approach a downed deer from the rear as a safety precaution.
2. When you're certain it's dead, unload your firearm and set it out of the way.
3. Move the deer so its head is uphill, even if only slightly, and roll it onto its back. If you have a companion, ask for help to keep the animal in proper position, otherwise prop it up with rocks or wood.
4. Next, while standing at the tail end and facing the head end, make a cut from just above the anus to the base of the jaw. Make this in several steps and always cut to one side of the penis and testicles or milk bag.
 - A. At the bottom of the abdominal cavity, lift a pinch of skin and slit it. Don't cut down. Great care is needed to avoid puncturing the intestines or paunch. If you shot the deer with an arrow and have not retrieved the broad head, caution must be used so as not to injure yourself on it while completing the rest of the field dressing. Insert the tip of the blade into the small opening you made in the abdominal cavity. Make sure the knife point is toward the head of the deer and the cutting edge is up. Insert two fingers of your free hand in the slit on either side of the blade. With the back of your hand, hold down the intestines and paunch as you gently slit up the belly. Cut all the way to the bottom of the rib cage. At this point, the knife will meet the sternum.
 - B. The sternum is a very white bone. Do not cut into it. Instead cut to one side where the ribs attach. This is best done with a saw or hatchet. The bone is soft there. You may have to straddle the deer and cut upward. Never cut toward yourself, but always towards the deer's neck. If the deer's head is to be mounted, stop cutting before you reach the brisket. If not, cut up through the neck area to the base of the jaw. If the deer is to be dragged far, don't cut up through the neck area; rather, stop at the brisket until you get to camp. This will help keep dirt out.
- C. Now go back to the pelvis area and slit the skin from the stomach area to the anus. Always cut with the blade between the meat and the skin. This way hair is not cut. Cut in the direction away from you.
- D. Next, cut the meat down to the pelvic bone. The pelvis can then be easily split with a hatchet. With a little patience you can split most pelvises with a hunting knife. Just feel for a small bone nubbin on the inside of the pelvis. Feel this nubbin with your finger. It's near the stomach where the intestine goes through the pelvis. The pelvis is connected together at this point. It can be split easiest if the split is begun directly above the center of the nubbin.
5. Now walk toward the head end and reach inside and grasp the windpipe. Pull it out and cut off as high up as possible. This may mean cutting in close quarters, so be careful not to injure yourself.
6. Now use the windpipe to pull out the lungs and heart. You may have to cut around the windpipe where it enters the chest cavity.
7. When you reach the diaphragm, cut it loose from the rib cage, being careful not to puncture the paunch.
8. Again grasp the windpipe and carefully but firmly, without jerking, pull out the stomach, lower gut, bladder, penis/vaginal tract, and rectum. Pull the entire mass gently toward the rear, making sure all of it is free in the cavity. The large intestine should pull through the split pelvis.
9. All entrails should now be outside of the deer. Cut off the anus and all is separated from the deer.
10. Now you should have a cleaned animal. Lift the deer by the front legs and let the cavity drain. Or tip the deer over on its stomach, keeping the head and shoulders higher than the rest of the animal, so it will drain by itself. If you intend to save the heart, cut it free and put it in a plastic bag. You should have a bag for this purpose.





wear latex gloves

Game Birds

1. Pluck off the bird's belly feathers.
2. Make an incision below the breastbone.
3. Insert two fingers into the body cavity and pull free the internal organs, stomach and intestine. Pull free the lower intestine and anus.
4. Drain the cavity and store the body in a cool, ventilated place.



wear latex gloves

Small Game

1. Cut through the skin and pelvic bone at the anus. Cut up to the breastbone, working a finger under the blade to avoid cutting the stomach or intestines.
2. Hold the animal with one hand. With the other, reach into the body cavity and pull loose the esophagus and windpipe, and work loose the internal organs. Pull free the lower intestine and anus in a downward motion.
3. Wipe out the cavity, and allow the body to cool.

E. Field care and transportation

You've made the kill. Now begins the work of tagging the game, field dressing it, and transporting it to your home or camp.

Meat quality is greatly influenced by how an animal is hunted and how the meat is cared for. Obtaining top-quality meat begins before the hunt and continues right through to the choice of cooking recipes. Everything you do or don't do influences how the meat tastes at the dinner table.

An animal should not be chased before it is killed. A running, stressed or wounded animal yields meat strongly flavored by the accumulation of waste products in the muscle—all the more reason to work hard for one-shot kills. Remember: The hunter, not the cook, is responsible for the flavor of the meat!

Tagging and evidence of sex

Your first step after the kill is to tag the animal. **Tagging** an animal means you are claiming the animal as yours by properly notching your tag and attaching it to the animal's carcass. See the *Montana Big Game Hunting Regulations* for the proper tagging procedure. Make sure you keep proper **evidence of sex** and species naturally attached to the carcass. The *Montana Big Game Hunting Regulations* also clearly explains this procedure.

Field dressing

Once you properly tag the animal, you need to **field dress** and cool the meat immediately. This involves removing the entrails and internal organs. Opening the body cavity also allows the meat to cool and helps prevent spoilage. The meat must be kept cool, dry and clean; heat, dirt and moisture can cause meat to spoil or taste bad.

If you have never field dressed an animal before, it might be a little intimidating the first time. The best way to learn is to have an experienced hunter show you how. There will be blood, and sometimes the body content doesn't smell very good. But remember, this is all a part of hunting.

Be careful when field dressing. It is easy to get cut with a knife or a sharp bone end.

Field dressing precautions. Heat is a real problem since bacteria grow rapidly in a carcass. Animals need to be cooled off as quickly as possible and kept cool. This can be difficult in warm weather. Don't cram your birds or small animals together in a hot game pouch or throw them in a pile. Leave them out where the air can circulate and cool them. Don't leave them in a car trunk when it's warm outside. Take them home right away and put them someplace cool. Also, don't leave large animals lying on the snow. Snow tends to insulate, rather than cool, the carcass. The meat cools more quickly if the animal is skinned right away, hung up off the ground out of direct sunlight and covered with a game bag or cloth. Keep

the animal as clean as possible. Dirt can also ruin the meat of game animals.

Disease is not common in free-ranging wildlife populations. However, hunters should take precautions to prevent any unnecessary contact with infected animals.

- ❖ Wear rubber or latex gloves when handling the animal.
- ❖ Do not cut internal organs, spinal cord or bones when opening the body cavity or removing the entrails.
- ❖ Stay informed about wildlife disease issues in your hunting area and know how to tell whether an animal is infected.
- ❖ Contact your local Fish, Wildlife & Parks office to report any animal that appears sick.

In most cases, wildlife diseases do not affect people. However, there are a few exceptions. Rabies epidemics are uncommon, but are a serious concern. Tularemia, occasionally found in rabbits, beavers and other animals, is another health concern. One animal disease that has captured a lot of attention lately is Chronic Wasting Disease or CWD. There is no evidence that CWD can spread from game animals to humans, but cautious hunters will want to learn more about it.



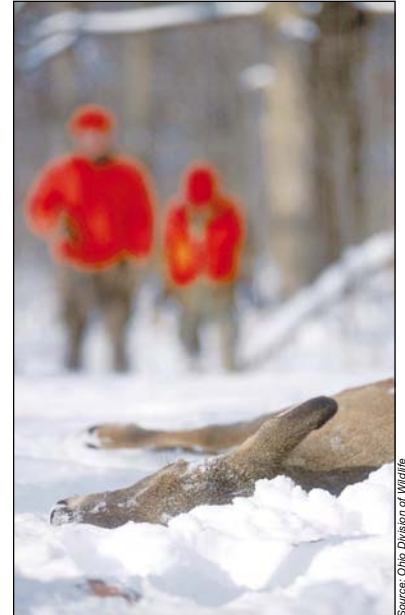
Source: Ohio Division of Wildlife

Field dressing equipment. Most birds and game animals can be field dressed with a normal, sharp hunting knife with a 2½- to 4-inch blade. Bring a sharpening steel to sharpen your knife while you are working. Field dressing larger animals might require a game saw or axe to split bones. If you

want to keep the heart and liver to eat, use plastic bags to carry them home. For large animals that must be skinned and quartered in the field, you need cheesecloth game bags to hang meat and protect it from flies. You might also want to carry some paper towels to wipe out the body cavity and clean yourself. Remember not to litter!

Transporting

When transporting game in a vehicle, make sure that the carcass remains clean and that it receives enough air circulation. One or two hunters can drag most deer out of the woods: just pull it along, stopping to rest as needed. If there is snow on the ground, you can use a plastic sled or cart to move the carcass. Never carry a deer on your shoulders. This can be extremely dangerous because you might look like a deer to another hunter. In dry conditions, a larger animal usually must be cut up into halves or quarters and then packed out by backpack or horse. In remote locations, this can sometimes take several days.



Source: Ohio Division of Wildlife



Chapter Eight Quiz

1. If you shoot a deer and it runs out of sight, you should: (Mark the correct answer.)
☐ assume you missed and keep hunting.
☐ wait at least half an hour before tracking, depending on the blood trail.
☐ immediately follow the blood trail as quickly as possible so the meat doesn't spoil.

2. If you lose the blood trail you should: (Mark the correct answer.)
☐ get down on your hands and knees and look for tiny drops of blood.
☐ go back to the last spot of blood you found and try again.
☐ start at the last drop you found and search in ever-widening circles.
☐ all of the above.

3. Which of the following is NOT recommended when approaching downed wildlife? (Mark the correct answer.)
☐ Approach from behind.
☐ Shoot it again to make sure it is dead.
☐ Poke the animal gently with a stick.
☐ Touch the eye gently with a stick; if there is no reaction, the animal is usually dead.

4. The first thing you should do after you determine the animal is dead is: (Mark the correct answer.)
☐ cut across the throat area to let it "bleed out."
☐ tag it according to the hunting regulations.
☐ throw it over your shoulders and pack it out to your vehicle.

5. You should field dress an animal as quickly as possible after recovering the carcass because: (Mark the correct answers.)
☐ removing the entrails makes the carcass lighter to transport.
☐ removing the entrails allows the meat to cool, which helps keep it from spoiling.

6. You should always: (Mark the correct answer.)

- _____ transport your game over your shoulders without using hunter orange.
- _____ display the carcass and the head on top of your vehicle as you drive home.
- _____ tag your animal after you get it home.
- _____ tag your big game animal before field dressing it.

7. The most important thing you can do to make sure your game tastes good on the dinner table is: (Mark the correct answer.)

- _____ use a lot of ketchup.
- _____ properly field dress the animal and care for the meat while you're still in the field.
- _____ keep the carcass wrapped in plastic until you can field dress it.

